



2020-2021
ANNUAL REPORT

STONINGTON FREE LIBRARY

**ENRICHING LIVES
AND BUILDING COMMUNITY**

FROM THE DIRECTOR

As I reflect on this past year at the Library, certain words come to mind: Change, Consistency, Commitment and Community. There have been many changes at the Library, a new accessible building addition and interior renovation, new ways to offer our beloved programs, services and collections and even a change in the Library's leadership. Despite all of these changes, the Library has remained committed to and consistent in its mission to enrich lives and build community by bringing information, ideas and people together.

Last summer, we were in the midst of finishing the new addition complete with a ramp, elevator and a bathroom and storage closet on each level of the Library. As the addition was nearing completion, we jumped right into the interior renovation. The renovation refreshed, redesigned and re-equipped the Library to keep up with evolving user needs. We were committed to making the Library accessible to all after listening to feedback during our strategic planning process and we made that goal a reality.



Karla Umland,
Assistant Director
and Micayla Hall,
Director.

We hope the community is as pleased with the results of this project as we are. If you haven't had a chance to stop in and see the changes yet, we welcome you and hope to see you soon!

Besides accessibility, financial sustainability was another strategic initiative on which we made significant progress this past year. Our \$1.8 million Capital Campaign goal was achieved! The Capital Campaign raised the money needed to complete the building project and increase our endowment. An increased endowment size means more operating funds to continue and enhance programming, services, collections, staffing and hours of operation. THANK YOU, THANK YOU to all our Capital Campaign donors, our dedicated Campaign Committee and our unwavering Building Committee for your support in achieving our objectives. It truly would never have happened without

the commitment of each and every one of you. The steadfast and generous support from our donors and volunteers is overwhelming and deeply appreciated.

Throughout the ever-evolving pandemic, we have had to quickly pivot and come up with new and creative ways to consistently offer community access to our vital programs, services and collections. This past year we significantly increased our digital library collection through new platforms such as Hoopla, Kanopy and The Palace Project. These new platforms give library cardholders access to eBooks, audiobooks, comics, music, movies and TV shows right from the comfort of home. Our programs have continued virtually through Zoom, our YouTube channel and our new reading program app Beanstack. We also made it easier than ever to sign up for a library card online. Our efforts to bridge the digital divide continued through the creation of a hotspot lending program, thanks to a grant from the Community Foundation of Eastern CT, and we were even able to expand our WiFi reach outside the building through the Everybody Learns Initiative.

Our esteemed and irreplaceable leader Belinda de Kay announced her retirement in January. Well, semi-retirement that is; she is still very involved on a part-time basis as our Director Emeritus. We couldn't let her get away that easily - the Library just wouldn't be the same! Even though SFL leadership has changed, it has been a smooth and consistent changeover. Karla and I remain committed to the Library's mission and service to the entire Stonington community.

I must extend one last thank you for the kind and encouraging words we receive year round from members of the community. Your feedback keeps us motivated and energized to both consistently innovate and continue to offer your favorite library programs and services. I look forward to the coming year with optimism and encouragement, and hope that we will continue to achieve goals already in place and set new ones as the world continues to change in unanticipated ways.



Belinda de Kay receives an award from the Town of Stonington for her 40 years of service.

"I hope you feel very proud of all you and SFL have accomplished in this benighted year. The new space looks wonderful and the ongoing library services have truly helped me survive the isolation."
-Adult Patron

FROM THE PRESIDENTS

It's hard to remember that at this time last year, our Library was closed to the public due to the pandemic; in many ways, time has lost its usual rhythm over the past 18 months. But as we think about how those months have unfolded, pride and perseverance are recurring themes.

The necessity of closing the doors didn't stop our dedicated team from finding new and creative ways of reaching out and engaging our community. By late October the Stonington Free Library was among the earliest libraries in Connecticut to reopen for in-person visitors, thanks to protocols and precautions designed to maintain community and staff safety.

We are so grateful for the partnership of our Library staff and Board of Trustees, whose ingenuity, steadfastness and resilience were essential as we continued to serve the entire Stonington community. When in person programs and services proved impossible, our staff found a way to do things differently, whether that meant take-and-make family crafts, outdoor Open Mic evenings, Zoom lectures or curbside pickup. Focusing on community first let our users know that together we could and would find a way to connect with Library resources, books and each other.



While more specific details are provided in the Director's Letter and elsewhere in this report, we are proud of the many things accomplished by the Library during this challenging period. In particular, the achievements highlighted below will provide lasting benefits well into the future:

- The 2020 Capital Campaign successfully concluded with \$1.8MM in commitments, and the building addition and refurbishment projects were completed, with a virtual ribbon cutting ceremony in December;
- SFL successfully expanded its community access by increasing and upgrading its physical space, enhancing its digital collection and adding fiber-based internet service plus improved wifi capabilities;
- Our endowment grew by 35% to \$4.6 million as of 6/30/21, through a combination of capital campaign proceeds and strong investment performance, setting the stage for a more sustainable financial future;

- We were granted a second round of Payroll Protection Plan funding, which provided \$70,000 to protect our valued staff and their positions through the pandemic, and we continue to work in partnership with the Town of Stonington, the CT State Library and the Institute of Museum and Library Services to identify opportunities for American Rescue Plan grant funding; and
- Last but certainly not least, we successfully implemented our staffing succession plan with the promotion of Micayla Hall to Library Director and the addition of Karla Umland as Assistant Director. Building on the partnership that Micayla established with Belinda de Kay, Director Emeritus, these two talented, energetic women are well poised to lead us into the future.

As the Stonington Free Library continued to support the community throughout this past year, the community in turn has continued to support the Library, which makes us very proud and thankful. Our total Annual Appeal results showed a slight increase, thanks to more than 530 generous donors, while 167 trusty volunteers contributed countless hours of time and effort to support Library initiatives.



Over the past year, change has been the only constant. When COVID vaccines became widely available in early spring, we began to imagine a gradual return to the pre-pandemic status quo; sadly, the emergence of the Delta variant makes that prospect seem a bit more remote. But we are embracing the “new normal” and building on the momentum of this past year’s accomplishments, while taking the opportunity to consider new strategic initiatives for the year ahead.

As we move forward we are reminded of the words and actions of author Margaret Wheatley, whose goal is to encourage organizations around the world to evoke people’s inherent generosity, creativity and need for community. We recognize that we cannot predict what challenges the future will bring, but continue to affirm our commitment to our mission.

With thanks,

Allegra & Denise

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

**As of June 30, 2021*

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“I love the people that work there;
I can always count on them to be friendly and help me with my library needs.”

- Teen Patron

PROGRAMMING AND SERVICES

Our library community has been thrilled to "come back" into a renovated, accessible building to browse and borrow materials, read the newspaper, use laptop computers, and more. Throughout the year we continued to offer a variety of virtual and in-person programming including the Sunday Evening Lecture Series, Thoughtful Thursdays programs, and two Book Groups. Once again our in-person outreach Book Group at Masonicare Senior Living Community started meeting in May with safety precautions.

This year a special focus on enhancing and expanding digital services greatly improved connections onsite and in the cloud! We even initiated a program to lend Wi-Fi hotspot devices that provide an internet connection almost anywhere.

Through the American Rescue Plan and the Connecticut State Library, we were able to purchase several new computers, a new people counter, and a Square point of sale device further improving our operating technology and ability to serve the public more effectively.

Second Sundays

- Ray Uzan: "Namibia Africa's Coastal Treasure"
- Stuart Vyse: "Superstition"
- Margaret Gibson and selected poets: "Waking Up to the Earth"
- Marc Zimmer: "State of Science"
- Deborah Royce: "Ruby Falls"

Third Thursdays

- Noreen Kepple: "Pollinators"
- Mary Ellen Welch & Sara Tomis from UConn Extension: "Healthy Housekeeping with COVID-19"
- Jean Baur: "Searching for Jobs in the Digital Age"
- Kim Larkin: Chocolate & Coffee Tasting
- Joanna Scott and James Longenbach: "Excuse Me While I Disappear" and "Forever"
- Lee Howard and Tom Schuch: "Anatomy of a News Story-Frederick Douglass in New London"
- Gail B. MacDonald and Lee Howard: "A Hidden History of Mystic and Stonington"
- Tom Schuch and Lee Howard with Special Honored Guests: Downing Simmons Jr. and Gregory Simmons: "The Negro Motorist Green Book in New London and Stonington"

New program formats explored different ways to come together -- the Community Open Mic events and Knitting Group "al fresco" met outdoors in Wadawanuck Square. We introduced creative hands-on experiences with "grab and go kits" that patrons picked up at the library to use at home during virtual programs. Even familiar programs took advantage of improved ways to connect people and programs -- the adult Summer Library Challenge grew by using our online registration program Beanstack, going from 12 adults last year to 125 this year.



Zoom Knitting Group



New graphic novel section



Staff Picks section



Lending WiFi Hot Spots



SFL Community Open Mic Nights



SFL BY THE NUMBERS

Website Users: 15,000

YouTube Views: 17,428

Trustees: 13

Full-time Staff: 3

Part-time Staff: 12

Volunteers: 167

Little Free Libraries: 4

Little Free Libraries Books Distributed: 725

Physical & Digital Checkouts: 50,433

Webpage Views: 41,755

Programs Offered: 137

Program Attendees: 2,106

Summer Reading Program Registrants: 479

Active Cardholders: 3,158

"Even during this uncertain time you organized such an awesome program taking lots of trouble.

Hats off to all the staff."

- Adult Patron

YOUTH SERVICES

Our year began as the last one ended, with much uncertainty in our "Groundhog Day" world. We have seized opportunities to adjust and improve our space, our programs and our selection of books. We have experimented with Grab & Go Bags, Zoom virtual programs, and continued virtual Story Times. We opened the Children and Teen Rooms to the public for our friends to browse and select books and movies, take part in our Summer Reading Program live and see our beautifully renovated space with elevator access for all. Our overriding concern continues to be the health and safety of our patrons and we take this responsibility seriously downstairs, as none of our young patrons are able to be vaccinated.



Online Story Time with Mrs. Frey



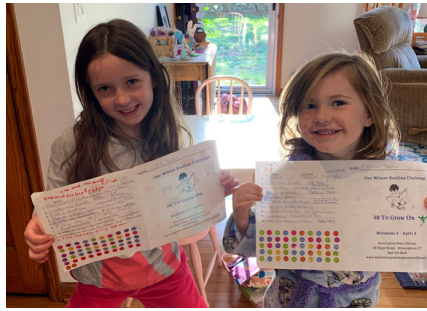
50 to Grow On Winter Reading Challenge

We wanted to find cloud-based software that would support both our Summer Reading program and other reading challenges that we conduct over the course of a year. After research, we chose to purchase Beanstack software, a program that makes online registering and logging easier for our patrons. It enables them to access programs from home, along with excellent customer support. Beanstack offers an online app that is attractive and simple to use. It also allowed us to link our Summer Reading survey for the state so patrons could answer online. We posted the results on our website in September.

It is easy to lose patience in these unusual times, hard to recognize that we are living through a historical event, and important to keep hope that, like all things, the sadness and fear will end. Stay well. We have lots of activities in the works.

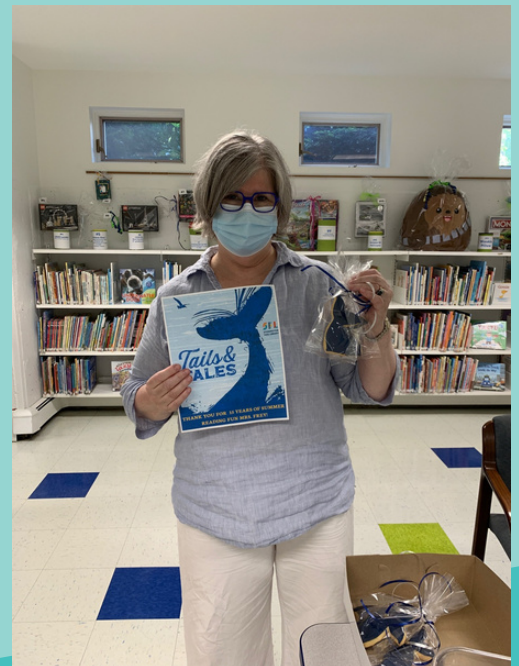
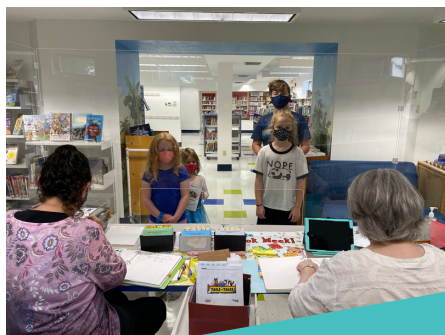


Library friends made Grab and Go Bird Feeders



CELEBRATION

We were happy to celebrate 15 years of Summer Reading fun with Mrs. Frey on the last day of Summer Reading this year.



Cookies by Zest Fresh Bakery - Stonington

"I like the great reading lists that recommend books. I have learned a lot reading those books! I also like the raffle tickets."
- Young Patron

MYSTERY DINNER

In the Village: A Celebration of Stonington Artists and Authors

On a beautiful July evening, over 150 friends and neighbors gathered together under a tent outside the Library for our 2021 Mystery Dinner. After cancellations in April 2020 and 2021 due to the pandemic, the twelfth rendition of this popular event was hotly anticipated!

The cocktail hour was held on Wadawanuck Square under blue skies and perfect weather, where guests had a long-awaited opportunity to catch up with one another. At 7pm, our guests

departed, dispersing across Stonington to join their mystery hosts for elegant dining and spirited conversation.

We are so thankful for our generous hosts, sponsors and volunteers that helped make this event possible. Proceeds from the Mystery Dinner support library supplies, operations and programming.

We look forward to seeing you again in 2022!





MYSTERY DINNER HOSTS

We thank our hosts who opened their homes for this annual event.

Alden Alexander, Kevin Costello & Jocelyn Kepple
 Katherine Ballard and Revell Horsey
 Beth & Sam Chapin
 Kathy & Tig Conger
 Barbara & Chris Dixon
 Deb Dodds & Greg Smith
 Anne Fix & Kevin Bowdler, Alejandra & Josh Welch
 Geraldine Griffin
 Kate & Tim Love
 Betsy Luchars & Becky Wright
 Amy & Tyger Nicholas
 Joan & Tim O'Neill
 Laura Paige
 Joyce & Francis Pandolfi
 Alexa & Dan Pearson
 Jane & Tony Pellegrini
 Cheryl & Dave Purvis
 Marcia Santoni & John Morris
 Vivie von Walstrom & Rick Farmer



"I really liked that the pandemic did not stop the program and the librarians got creative with how it could still go on."

- Adult Patron

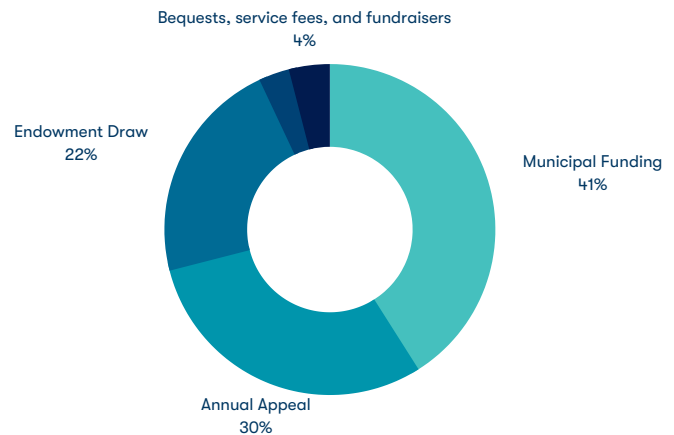
FINANCIALS

Preliminary Financial results for the Year Ended June 30, 2021 (unaudited)



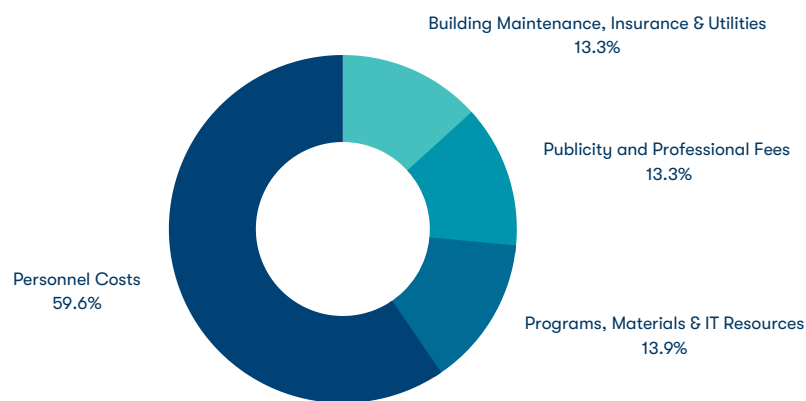
We are pleased to report that the Library is in good financial health and has made substantial strides towards financial sustainability with the completion of the Capital Campaign and increased municipal funding.

Over the past fiscal year, Stonington Free Library recorded approximately \$580,000 in operating income, up from \$550,000 in the previous year. Operating income does not include gains on investments or the forgiven PPP Loan of \$70,000. Municipal funding from the Town and Borough was up \$50,000 from the previous year thanks to an increase from the Town of Stonington and represented the largest portion (41%) of our revenue. The Annual Appeal raised \$176,000 or 30% of operating income. Draws from the endowment amounted to \$128,000, providing 22% of the total. We applied for, and received, \$16,000 in grants. The remaining \$23,000, (4%) of income came from bequests, service fees, and fundraisers. Overall, our income was up \$30,000 from the prior year. Of this, \$50,000 was from increased municipal funding. We fell short on fundraising, memorials and bequests by \$20,000. Fundraisers were below the prior year because of cancelled events.



The Library received a second Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) Loan from the federal government of \$70,000 which has been forgiven in the current fiscal year. This loan enabled us to keep all employees on the payroll. COVID-19 impacted all of our 2020 fundraisers including the Mystery Dinner, Book Sale, Battle of Stonington 5K, and Read-a-thon. We are pleased that the 2021 summer has seen a return to normalcy and we will see the benefit of this summer's fundraisers in next year's numbers.

Operating expenses for the year were \$573,000, an increase of almost \$50,000 over the previous year. This increase was due primarily to additional spending on digital and print resources, and enhanced cleaning protocols due to COVID. Total operating expenses for the year were in line with a budget of \$575,000. As you would expect, payroll costs represent most of the expense budget at \$364,000 or 64% of total expenses. The next largest expense category is library materials, programs, and digital resources at \$85,000.



These numbers do not include any of the income or expenses associated with the Capital Campaign which was successfully completed in 2020.

During the year, the Board approved the creation of a \$340,000 Capital Expenditure Fund that will be used to pay for regular Capital Improvements. Each year, there are several capital expenditures, planned and unplanned that make budgeting very difficult. The creation of this Capital Expenditure Fund is an important step towards the Library being financially sustainable and not exposed to large one-off capital expenditure surprises.

Endowment Update

The endowment has performed incredibly well in the year ending June 30, 2021, with a closing balance of \$4.6MM, up from \$3.4MM a year earlier. Of this increase, \$400,000 represents additional funds from the Capital Campaign that were invested in the Endowment. The remaining \$800,000 is the net of capital gains, interest, and dividends less the Endowment draw of \$130,000. The Endowment has returned 24% in the 12 months ending June 30, 2021.

"Volunteering is the ultimate exercise in democracy. You vote in elections once a year, but when you volunteer, you vote every day about the kind of community you want to live in."

- Dr. Syed Muhammad Zeeshan Hussain Almashhadi

CONTRIBUTIONS

This report recognizes contributors to the Library during the past fiscal year – July 1, 2020 through June 30, 2021

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The Pediment Society recognizes the generosity of donors at levels of \$500 and above.

\$10,000+

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“Philanthropy, charity, giving voluntarily and freely...
call it what you like, but it is truly a jewel of an American tradition.”

- John F. Kennedy



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The Chester W. Kitchings Family Foundation

Awarded \$10,000 to support library operations

Community Foundation of Eastern Connecticut

Awarded \$4,830 to support Mobile HotSpot Lending Program

Mystic Woman's Club

Awarded \$500 to support Summer Reading

Walmart - Westerly

Awarded \$500 to support Book Sale

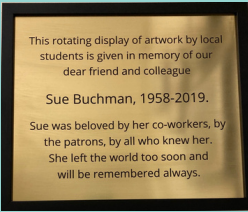
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- In memory of Catherine Donahue Lathrop
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Our newly established Stairwell Gallery honors the memory of staff member Sue Buchman with exhibits of local student artwork.



In memory of Stonington Fishermen Lost at Sea
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In memory of Mr. and Mrs. James Palmer Ramsey
The Estate of Elizabeth Holliday Ramsey



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The Babcock-Phelps Society, named for the Library's two earliest benefactors, recognizes individuals who have chosen to remember the Library in their estate planning documents.

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“Just a thank you for everything that you do at the library.
It is one of my favorite places in Stonington.”
-Teen Patron

CAPITAL CAMPAIGN

This report recognizes contributors to the Capital Campaign from January 1, 2017 – June 30, 2021

2020 Capital Campaign Achieves Goal Closes with \$1,800,000 in Commitments

During the past year, SFL successfully concluded its 2020 Capital Campaign, reaching its goal of \$1.8MM in total pledges from over 390 participants. Bringing together contributions from the State of Connecticut and the Town of Stonington, private and public charitable foundations as well as individual donors, this was truly a community-wide effort!

Nearly \$1,000,000 of the funds raised were spent on the building addition and internal renovations and refurbishment, and we are very proud that these accomplishments were achieved on time and on budget. The remaining balance of campaign proceeds will be designated as additions to the Library's endowment; as of June 30, 2021 a total of \$400,000 had been added to the balance, and the remaining funds are slated to be added as pledges are received. The benefits of a larger endowment are two-fold, helping to fund current operations through an annual draw while also ensuring financial stability into the future.

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Valentina Marchenkoff

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